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PRESENCE

By

Erv Schroeder

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts

MFA Photography Program
School of Photographic Arts and Sciences
Rochester Institute of Technology
Rochester, New York
May, 1984

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Introduction

The following report is a description of the concepts responsible for the point of view expressed in my work. These concepts are a synthesis of interests that became influences, forming a frame of reference for my ideas and the inspiration for my work. This frame of reference has become a reservoir for my work at a subconscious level. It's sources are:

Astronomy

Looking through the telescope, I am able to see the planets, nebula, star clusters and the extragalactic islands, the galaxies; objects that are at incomprehensible distances from the earth in both time and space.

There is a sense of discovery, and a feeling of experiencing a new place upon visually locating these celestial objects: the cloud bands of Jupiter and Saturn, Saturn's majestic rings, the patterning of stars in a star cluster, the wispy dust and gas clouds of a nebula and the shape of galaxies.

Astronomy has influenced both my view of the world and my work. I tend to search for similar otherworldly qualities in terrestrial objects. While viewing celestial objects embedded in the blackness of an infinite

space, I am jarred from the temporal world and begin to realize a grander scale.

There are nine planets in the solar system, the Earth is the third planet from the sun. There are an estimated 10^{20} planets in all the galaxies. The Sun is a type G star or an average star. There are an estimated 10^{10} stars in an average galaxy. Contained in the Orion arm of the Milky Way, the sun and its' family of planets rotate around the galactic nucleus of stars, 1 revolution = 200 million years, the Milky Way is approximately 100,000 light years in diameter (1 LY = 6 trillion miles). The Milky Way is a spiral galaxy, there are an estimated 10^{10} galaxies in the known universe.

In this grand scale or scheme of the Universe, the existence or survival of man as a species does not matter, the mechanisms of the Universe will continue.

Space and Time

The telescope becomes a time machine; to look out into space is to look back in time. We are in fact seeing these objects as they were, frozen in time at different stages of their evolution. As a result of this idea I think of the camera as a time machine that can freeze or allow the passing of time to flow before

the film; a permanent record, a bit of the past existing in the future.

Although the galaxies are frozen in time from our viewpoint, they are not static. According to the red-shifting of the spectra of galaxies, all of them are receding into space at incredible velocities. The greatest velocity yet measured is of a cluster of galaxies that are receding at forty one percent of the speed of light at approximately 7600 miles per second. This recession into space both expands and changes the shape of space.

According to Einstein's general theory of relativity, the path of light, that is the geometry of space, is affected by the presence of matter in it. The curvature is locally greater, for example, near a massive body than it is far from all objects. The general curvature of space depends on the average density of matter in the universe. (1).

The phenomenon of the distribution of matter and its effect on space, has caused me to rethink my approach to my work, both photographically and sculpturally. In the photographs I can use this idea to justify the distortions I create in the space of the images. Concerning the sculptures, their positioning affects the space by activating it with their presence.

The following description of physical laws and theories is intended as background information. Later in this report these concepts will be referred to as

I make my own interpretations of them.

To our perceptions the flow of time is composed of a series of moments, unaccountable without the association of motion or a specific event. Aristotle has said that "We comprehend time only when we have marked motion...not only do we measure the movement by time, but also the time by the movement because they define each other.". According to Aristotle there exists an eternal physical triangle in which time, space, and motion exist and are measurable only in relation to each other. Time is measured by motion in space. Motion is measured by time and space. Space can be measured by time and motion.

Newton discusses motion further by saying that, "If two bodies are in uniform motion relative to each other, there is no possible way to tell which of them is in a state of motion and which is at rest, except with a third reference point.".

Einstein elaborates on Newton's idea by stating, "That time is as relative as motion...there is no absolute frame of reference by which motion can be measured, so there is no absolute time.". The only absolute is that the speed of light is unaffected by any relative motion.

Water

I am awed by the scale of large bodies of water; the scale has the same infinite feeling as space. In my work I try to give the water the appearance of the void of space, by rendering it as an infinite dark plane. The surface of this plane can be thought of as the boundary between air and water, the point where evaporation takes place, the transformation of water into air.

I am fascinated by the unceasing motion of the sea, as if it has been destined to a restless eternity, never able to be still. Constant breaking of the waves keep the beach in a state of flux. These changes occur several ways: the washing ashore of debris, as if the sea were cleansing itself; the changing shape of the shore line, particularly after a storm; and the vein-like patterns that are left on the shore as marks of the receding waves. These aspects of the beach and sea provide images for the photographs and impressions of shapes for sculpture.

It is a powerful experience upon arriving at a beach for the first time. I am drawn to the water and yet repelled by it because of a fear of water. I am panicked by the infinite scale of the sea and the sound of the waves.

Ancient Monuments

Staring back at us through time, the Pyramids, Stonehenge, the heads of Easter Island and the abandoned cities of the Maya, Aztec and Inca give one a sense that they have always existed. They are instilled with a monumental presence by their builders. Time has no meaning to them, they are like light, they are eternal.

We know that even unhewn stones had a highly symbolic meaning for ancient and primitive societies. Rough, natural stones were often believed to be the dwelling places of spirits or gods, and were used in primitive cultures as tombstones, boundary stones, or objects of religious veneration.
(2).

The ancient use of geometry and search for exquisite form are also of interest. I am drawn to the minimal qualities of their monuments. It seems that geometry is as old as man but as new and vital as a new generation.

Electronic Music

I enjoy the complex layering of the sonic space created with the unique tones generated by the synthesizer. This sonic space has an otherworldly quality; it is a spacious sound. At times the sounds are like the tearing of space or the roar of a gas

kiln. I have interpreted this otherworldly quality as if it were the "Music of the Spheres" that Pythagoras and Kepler believed existed.

He (Pythagoras) pictured a series of concentric spheres, in which each of the seven moving objects--the planets, the sun, and the moon--was carried by a separate sphere from the one that carried the stars, so that the motions of the planets resulted from independent rotations of different spheres about the earth. The friction between them gave rise to harmonious sounds, the music of the spheres... (3).

There is a floating quality to this music, giving one a sense of a slowing down of time and an expansion of space. It is possible to lose oneself among the complexly entwined layers and subtly changing repetitions. These are the qualities of electronic music that I hear in my memory.

The death of my father

Witnessing his futile, agonizing three and one half month struggle to stay alive was devastating. I became obsessed with time and mortality. I began to think of how we, our minds, are trapped in ageing bodies with no escape.

- I somersaulted lazily and pleasantly

through the void, which is my hiding place when I dematerialize. Trout's cries to me faded as the distance between us increased.

His voice was my father's voice...

Here was what Kilgore Trout cried to me in my father's voice: "Make me young, make me young, make me young!" (4).

The Work

The concerns I expressed in the previous pages are applicable to my photographs as well as to my sculpture. There is no reason why a change from one medium to another should alter one's concepts and intent. I believe that shifting constantly from one medium to another serves to augment my imagery, singularly as well as collectively. For example, I have been photographing on the beach, this work has changed the sculpture; the edges have been softened, forms have become a combination of the angular and organic suggesting references to marine life. Beach sand is also being integrated into the surface of some sculptures.

My work is a continuum. I am engaged in an investigation of a world of my imagination. This world is self-contained and isolated, it is an escape from the temporal concerns of man and possesses the disjointed time and space of a dream.

I have recently had a dream which deals with aspects of my self-contained world. In this dream I am in a space similar to what I imagine the Grand Canyon to be. I am standing on the edge of one of an infinite number of eroded, sand colored towering plateaus. My field of vision is 360 degrees, I am above myself

looking down at myself and simultaneously viewing the distant horizon before me. The burning wind stings my face.

This dream is an analogy for my work. The images share the remoteness and isolation of the dream plateaus; the layered and distorted infinite dream space is echoed photographically. Objects in the photographs and the sculpture are similar in character to the sentinel-like figure guarding the wind swept dream plateaus.

The photographs and sculptures deal with a monumental presence. In the photographs an angle of view is chosen where the scale of things will have no reference points, one rationale for the choice of a minimal subject like the beach and sea. I use the objects that are there, distort their proper scale and warp the space.

I do not think of these images as landscape photographs, but as images of layers of space and time; an ambiguous surreal space. To create these images I am using the information recording qualities of photography and the application of my own interpretations of space/time concepts described earlier in the section addressing space/time theories.

I use a slow shutter speed, it allows the film to record the flow of time and the events carried along

with it. The resulting image shows the passage of time as layers of blurred motion. The blurring of time removes the events from reality. The closer the subject/object is to the camera, the more pronounced the effect. At greater distances from the camera the more time and motion appear to slow or be frozen. This could be thought of as time dilation.

If the camera is imagined as an observer relative to his position, he would see the foreground objects as having time and motion accelerated. Due to their speed, individual events are not discernable and the shape of objects become distorted and blurred as they pass in front of the lens. The camera would also observe that the background objects appear to be slowing down or exhibit a freezing of time and motion.

When a stationary object is added to the foreground, then multiple dimensions are at work. The speed of time and motion is accelerated relative to objects which appear frozen in time, or immune to the flow of time.

The sculptures are imagined as ancient or future monuments existing in the howling low tones of a surreal or otherworldly environment, a place similar to the space of the photographs. Also, the sculpture deals with a monumental presence in an object not of a monumental scale. The pieces are approximately three

feet tall, to give them the feeling of a monumental scale they must be placed on pedestals tall enough to raise them to eye level, so they assume a human scale and confront the viewer.

Contributing to the monumental feel of the pieces is their form. The forms are minimal in nature even though they are a synthesis of several shapes: wedges, fish, pods and stones. The form of a piece is a metamorphosis of several different shapes; each finished sculpture retains the character of its' components as well as the characteristics synthesized from the sum of its' parts.

The blurring of characteristics of each piece into a mysterious, ambiguous shape that is recognizable, gives the piece various reference points regarding its' origins. Is it from the sea? Has it been unearthed? Has it just landed? To answer the preceding questions I will use the Newtonian idea of marking motion by a reference point.

However for my less scientific purpose I have made a modification and will say that the only reference point for time is other blocks of time. To accomplish this the form needs to imply multiple time references regarding its' origins. For example, if I would make a form resembling a prehistoric axe, which also appears to be some sort of futuristic or alien seed pod. Thus

the piece would share two implied histories or time references: there is a blurring of time, because the object appears to have a presence in both the past and future, while existing in the space of the present: a Janus.

"How--how did I get here?"

" It would take another Earthling to explain it to you. Earthlings are the great explainers, explaining why this event is structured as it is, telling how other events may be achieved or avoided. I am a Tralfamadrian, seeing all time as you might see a stretch of the Rocky Mountains. All time is all time. It does not lend itself to warnings or explanations. It simply is. Take it moment by moment and you will find that we are all,...bugs in amber." (5).

FOOTNOTES

(1) George Abell, Exploration of the Universe , New York: Holt, Rienhart, and Winston., 1977 p.420

(2) Carl G. Jung, Man and His Symbols , Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1964 p.232-33

(3) George Abell, Exploration of the Universe , New York: Holt, Rienhart, and Winston., 1977 p.14

(4) Kurt Vonnegut Jr. Breakfast of Champions , New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1973 p302-03

(5) Kurt Vonnegut Jr. Slaughter House-five , New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1969 p.74

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APPENDIX

- A. ----- Procedure
- B. ----- List of Materials
- C. ----- Thesis Proposal
- D. ----- Thesis Show Invitation
- E. ----- Original Print
- F. ----- Slides of Installation
- G. ----- Slides of Photographs

Appendix--A

Procedure

I have been using infrared film for my work as an alternative to normal black and white film. I feel that conventional black and white film yeilds a predictable image, it does not significantly alter or transcend reality, but faithfully reproduces it.

However the argument may be made that the optical transformation of a colorful three dimensional world into a flat plane of gray tones is a transcending or alteration of reality. This is an expected result of the process of photography. I have chosen infrared film because of its' unconventional representation of the world.

Infrared film is sensitive to wavelengths just beyond the sensitivity of human vision. This sensitivity lies in the range of violet to red or 400 nm. to 700 nm. of the electromagnetic spectrum. (one nm. or nanometer = one millimicron). The infrared film avalible to consumers records only the near infrared radiation 700 nm. to 900 nm., this radiation is produced by incandescent objects, the sun or lamp filaments, this radiation is reflected or emitted through luminescence, the subjects themselves are not hot.

I am using infrared film with two formats, 35 mm. and 4x5. With the 35 mm. film I use a 25A filter in conjunction with a polarizing filter. The transmission of the 25A is 580 nm. to 900 nm., a large portion of the visible spectrum as well as the near infrared. The polarizing filter adds extra darkening to the sky. A very narrow band is transmitted by Wratten 87C gelatin filter used with the 4x5. This band is 800 nm. to 900 nm. This portion of the electromagnetic spectrum is in the long red or near infrared range and is invisible to the human eye.

There is a great deal of chance involved in using this material. I use no light meter, but have a set of exposure reference points I work from with each filter combination. I can not judge how the negative will look from the appearance of the original scene. It is difficult to judge if there is enough contrast in a scene or which objects will or will not glow. I have tried to minimize the glowing of objects because it is a convention with this film. However, an object or two highly reflective of infrared enhances the image which otherwise would appear quite normal. The glowing of some objects contributes to the otherworldly qualities of the image.

The sculptural component of my work was executed in clay. I have changed the construction technique from slab building to working from a solid mass of

clay. Approximately 130 pounds of clay is shaped on a plaster bat and allowed to dry out so it can be stood up without danger of collapse.

The piece is then cut open and hollowed out until the walls are approximately one inch thick. At this point shapes are attached to the interior of the walls. When the interior is completed the opening is sealed up and the shape of the form is refined. Working in this primarily subtractive manner is an advantage to me. I can refine the form by cutting off large sections of clay, making quite radical changes without the worry of structural collapse.

When the shaping of the form has been completed, several layers of slurry containing a coarse silica sand and red art clay are brushed on to build up a rough textured layered surface. Then the piece is allowed to slowly dry out for a period of about a month.

Carefully two sculptures are loaded into a gas kiln. Size and thickness of these pieces dictate a slow firing cycle to avoid cracking or explosion. The kiln is left on pilot with the damper wide open for one day. Then the main burners and air are turned on. Heat is slowly built up until red heat is reached, this is the point when the atmosphere and objects in the kiln begin to glow a dull cherry red in color. The kiln may then be steadily taken up to temperature by

adjusting the gas and air mixture of the flame.

I am working in the low fire temperature range, cone 04 to 03 (1922°-1976° fahrenheit). I am also giving the work a heavy body reduction at the end of the firing. The reduction begins when cone 05 (1035°F) goes down, then reaches temperature (04-03) during the reduction.

Reduction begins when the air is shut off and the gas is left on, the damper is closed down to a very narrow opening. An orange yellow rooster tail of flame shoots out of the damper opening, flame and smoke will pour out of unplugged spy holes in the kiln door. A smoky orange flame can be seen swirling around inside the kiln through the bottom spy hole.

During reduction the atmosphere of the kiln is too rich in fuel to burn cleanly. As a result of the lack of oxygen during combustion, free carbon and carbon monoxide are liberated. Carbon monoxide is chemically active at the high temperatures in the kiln and will seize oxygen from any source such as oxides in the clay.

Reduction has the greatest affect on the iron in the clay. This affect is a color change of the iron oxides from brown or tan to black or grey. However, during cooling of the kiln, reoxidation occurs and the surface of the clay turns from the reduced black or grey to a warm reddish orange or brown. If the surface

is chipped the reduced body color is visible. The color resulting from reduction gives the work a pre-historic look.

When the firing is completed the gas is shut off and the damper closed. The gas rich atmosphere inside the kiln burns for several minutes after shut down. All openings are plugged, spy-holes, etc., and a ceramic-fiber blanket is put over the damper. Sealing the kiln is done to make sure it does not suck in cold air and crack the work by dropping the temperature too quickly. Instead, the temperature drops slowly by radiating away the heat, usually taking one or two days. The kiln is then unloaded.

Appendix--B

LIST of MATERIALSCAMERAS

35mm Nikon F2A.

Lens - 28mm Nikkor with 25A and polarizing filters.

4x5 Omega 45f View camera.

Lens - 180mm Fuji with 87c Kodak Wratten filter.

Titall tripod.

FILM

35mm Kodak High Speed Infrared film

4x5 Kodak High Speed Infrared film

Both film sizes developed in D-76 straight.

PAPER

8x10 Oriental Center F

Developed in D-72; 1:2 for three minutes,
with continuous agitation.

11x14 Agfa Portriga Rapid 111

Developed in Ewall Platinum 2;
1:9 for three minutes continuous agitation.

SCULPTURE

Clay - A04-03 orange terra cotta body, reduced at end
of firing for 45-60 minutes.

FORMULAS

Clay

60 lbs.--- Redart

15 lbs.--- Talc

15 lbs.--- A.P.Green Missouri fireclay

10 lbs.--- O.M.-4 (ball clay)

25 lbs.--- Grog (course mesh)

10 lbs.--- Mullite

5 lbs.--- Silica sand

+ 3 lbs.--- Fibrous Wollestinite

143 lbs.

plus one hand full of:

Barium Carbonate

Nylon fiver

plus 1 to 3 lbs. of sawdust.

GLAZES

Lithium Carbonate base glaze

| | | |
|------------------|-------|--------------|
| Lith. Carb. --- | 26 | grams |
| Epk. ----- | 33 | grams |
| Flint ----- | 59 | grams |
| Bentinite ----- | 5 | grams |
| Frit #3110 ----- | + 5.5 | <u>grams</u> |
| | 118.5 | grams |

Colorants added to base glaze:

| | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <u>Iron Chromate</u> | <u>4 grams = Gray</u> |
| <u>Copper Carbonate</u> | <u>6 grams = Purple Gray</u> |
| <u>Titanium Dioxide</u> | <u>4 grams = White</u> |
| <u>Cadmium Oxide</u> | <u>4 grams = Tan to White</u> |
| Magnesium Carbonate | 4 grams |
| <u>Copper Sulfate</u> | <u>4 grams = Purple Black</u> |
| Copper Carbonate | 4 grams |
| <u>Iron Chromate</u> | <u>3 grams = Blue-Green</u> |
| Potassium Bichromate | 4 grams |
| <u>Iron Chromate</u> | <u>2 grams = Gray-Black</u> |

BLACK SLIP

Red Art ----- 85 grams

Frit #3124 ----- 15 grams

Black Mason Stain ----- 4 grams

Magnesium Dioxide ----- 4 grams

Black Iron Oxide -----+ 2 grams

106 grams

PRESENCE

BY

Ervin Schroeder

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

MFA PHOTOGRAPHY PROGRAM
SCHOOL OF PHOTOGRAPHIC ARTS AND SCIENCES
ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
ROCHESTER, NEW YORK
SEPTEMBER, 1983

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PURPOSE:

For my thesis I intend to depict an unvisualized world utilizing geometry and a point of view to create a shifting and ambiguous space possessing a feeling of presence; it would also be an escape from the presence of man and the preoccupations of the temporal.

BACKGROUND:

The influences on my work are from a variety of sources: music, astronomy, surrealist and minimalist painting, and sculpture.

The music is electronic, because through its' complex layering and unusual sound it creates a unique sonic environment, a unique mental landscape.

Astronomy has changed my sense of the vastness of space and my perception of time. When we look at a galaxy, for example, we are looking back in time. If this object is perhaps 2.2 million light years away (speed of light = 186,000 miles per second; thus one light year is equivalent to 5.88 trillion miles) we see the galaxy as it was 2.2 million years ago. We do not see it as it exists now, but as it was before there was man on earth. Because of the distance between objects and the scale of space in general is forever infinite, and because light takes so long in arriving, time and space are intertwined.

Another influence upon my work comes from the surrealist painters: DeChirico, Dali, Magritte, and especially Yves Tanguy. I feel that these painters offer a visual representation of pure imagination, of

a dream-like place existing only in the mind of the artist creating the work. I'm concerned with similar ideas as they are portrayed in Tanguy's barren landscapes or seascapes. In his paintings, bone-like shapes occupy the foreground, and a seemingly infinite empty space surrounding them establishes an "other-worldly" quality. Such representation connects with my photographs.

I am also influenced by the minimalist artists concerned with an "other-worldly" quality: primarily the painter Al Held and the sculptors Tony Smith, and Arnolfo and Gio Pomodoro.

Held's work is a realization of an unvisualized world utilizing geometry and multiple perspective points to create a shifting, ambiguous space possessing a feeling of presence. In my photographs I am concerned with using the camera to produce a space which acts in a similar way as that of Held's.

The sculptor Tony Smith works with huge and heavy structures based on triangles and squares. These objects are usually painted black or left to weather. My pieces share a similar interest as Smith's in terms of scale, shape, and color.

The sculptor Arnolfo Pomodoro's work has a highly machined ancient look but perhaps of more importance to me is his brother Gio: in particular a piece called "Borromini Square II". The importance of this piece is the transformation of the square into large surfaces of sensually undulating bronze. The concept of geometry as being a fluid and sensually organic shape is a preoccupation in my work.

MATERIALS:

My thesis exhibit will consist of photographs and sculpture. The photographs will be executed with a 4x5 and 35mm camera using infrared film to accentuate the absence of a sense of time and the infinity of space.

The sculptures will be executed in clay using two different temperatures of clay bodies: cone 04 and cone 10. These pieces will be concerned with a monumental presence, geometry, and a feeling that these pieces are ancient.

The show will be held the week of April 16, 1983, at 28 Arlington Gallery of Photography, Rochester, New York.

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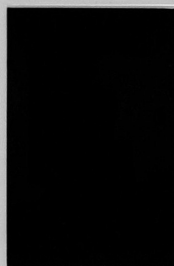
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Erv Schroeder
Installation



28 Arlington
April 84

Erv Schroeder
Installation



28 Arlington
April 84

Erv Schroeder
Installation



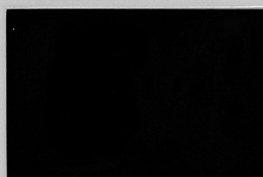
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April 84

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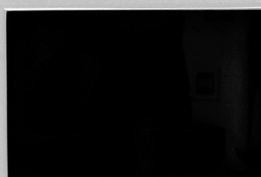
28 Arlington
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Installation



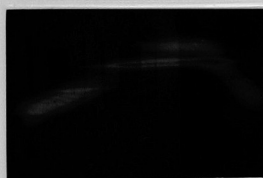
28 Arlington
April 84

Erv Schroeder
Installation



28 Arlington
April 84

Erv Schroeder
Installation



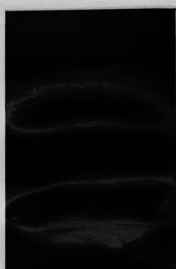
28 Arlington
April 84

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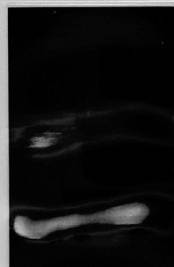
28 Arlington
April 84

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Installation



28 Arlington
April 84

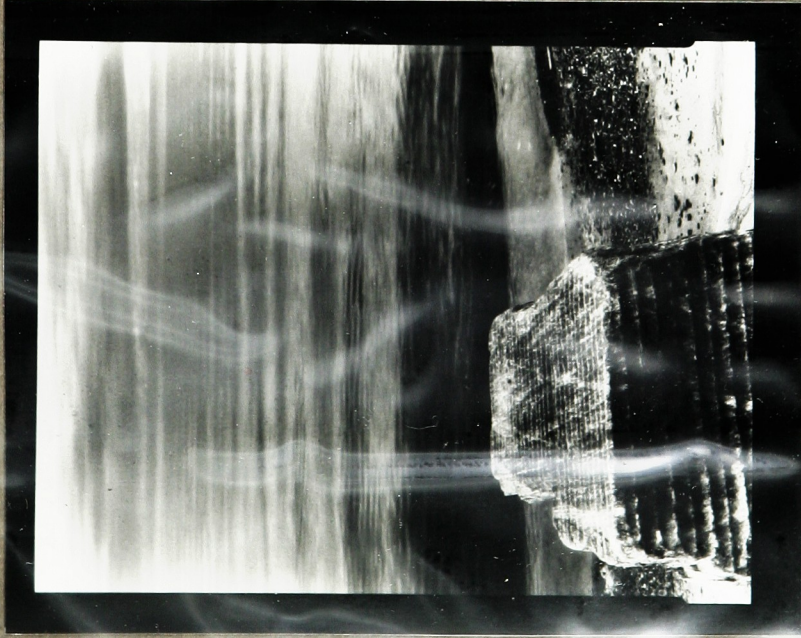
PRESENCE

An Exhibition of Photographs
and Sculpture
by ERV SCHROEDER
April 18, 1984 — April 26, 1984

Opening Celebration
Friday April 20, 1984 7:00 PM

28 ARLINGTON
Gallery of Photography
28 Arlington Street
Rochester, N.Y. 14607

Gallery Hours: Thursday, Friday, 6-9 PM Saturday, Sunday 1-5 PM





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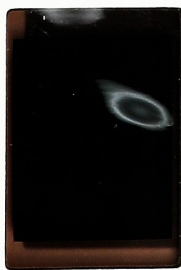
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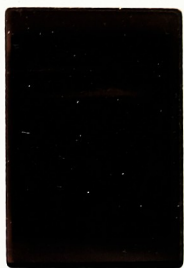
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